

HEIRS OF PAULDING, WILLIAMS, VAN WART, AND SER-
GEANT JOHN CHAMPE.

[To accompany Bill H. R. No. 278.]

MARCH 6, 1860.

Mr. Cox, from the Committee on Revolutionary Claims, submitted the following

REPORT.

The Committee on Revolutionary Claims, to whom were referred the and several petitions of the heirs of John Paulding, David Williams, Isaac Van Wart, praying remuneration for the services of their ancestors in the revolution, respectfully report :

That they adopt the able and satisfactory report of Mr. Dawes, of Massachusetts, made to the 35th Congress, and, with a very slight alteration, out of abundant caution, the bill reported by the committee. The following is Mr. Dawes' report :

The services for which these petitioners respectively ask the consideration of Congress are so intimately connected and so nearly identical that the committee deem it proper to consider the several petitions together, and make them the subject of one report. It can hardly be necessary to recount here the nature, or attempt to estimate the value of the services to the cause of the American revolution rendered by Paulding, Williams, and Van Wart. We live too near the time of that great struggle, and the liberties it secured us are too little impaired to permit of our forgetting that at one time in its progress, the entire cause was staked upon the fidelity of these three men, poor, uneducated militia men, serving in the ranks as volunteer common soldiers.

In 1780, General Benedict Arnold was placed by Washington, on his own application, in command of West Point and the other fortified posts in the highlands. He came to that command already distinguished for his military talents and bravery, but embarrassed by debts, which his fondness for display and extravagance of living had brought upon him, and smarting under a feeling that he had been slighted by Congress in the dispositions of important commissions, and been made the victim of envy and malice. He sought the post to betray it, and, by the ruin of the cause, wreak his vengeance upon those who had been, as he imagined, the cause of the injuries and injustice he had

received. He had been many months in bringing himself to this resolution and maturing his designs, opening and carrying on a secret correspondence with Major Andre, adjutant general of the British army. It is not the purpose of the committee to recite the details of the plan finally determined upon between Arnold and Major Andre, by which it was agreed that the former, the commanding general of the most important post held by our troops during the whole war, should for a price deliver up his command to the enemy, and himself join the standard of his country's foes, and assist in crushing out her existence. When these details shall have been forgotten, reports from committees will be of no avail. An interview took place within the American lines on the 21st September, 1780, between Arnold and Andre, at which all the preliminaries were agreed upon for the delivery of the American posts, and with them the American cause, into the hands of the enemy. At its close Andre took his departure for New York in disguise, but with the stipulations of the traitor, and the plans and strength of the posts, concealed on his person. While riding along a solitary way near Tarrytown, he was stopped in the road by Paulding, Williams, and Van Wart, who were casually that way and were at that moment at a game of cards by the way-side. Various devices were resorted to without avail to elude them. Large offers of gold failed to corrupt them. He was searched and the evidences of his mission and of the treason of Arnold were found concealed in his boots. It is a curious fact, that but one of these three humble men (Paulding) could read, and he with difficulty, and on his limited ability, as well as the incorruptibility of the three, hung the liberties of the country. They obtained, from the papers thus found on his person, sufficient information to excite suspicion, and they cherished a love of country enough to resist all temptation. They therefore took him a prisoner to the nearest American out-post and delivered him into the custody of its commandant. Of his subsequent trial, condemnation, and execution it is wholly unnecessary to speak. The plot was thus defeated.

General Washington, in a letter to Congress of date October 7, 1780, signifies his high appreciation of the magnitude of their services, and of their patriotism, in the following language :

"I have now the pleasure to communicate the names of the three persons who captured Major Andre, and who refused to release him, notwithstanding the most earnest importunities and assurances of a liberal reward on his part. Their conduct merits our warmest esteem, and I beg leave to add that I think the public will do well to make them a handsome gratuity. They have prevented, in all probability, our suffering one of the severest strokes that could have been meditated against us. Their names are John Paulding, David Williams, and Isaac Van Wart."

Congress accordingly passed the following preamble and resolution :

"IN CONGRESS, *November 3, 1780.*

"The committee, to whom was referred General Washington's letter of the 7th of October, delivered a report, which being read, Congress came to the following resolution :

"Whereas, Congress have received information that John Paulding, David Williams, and Isaac Van Wart, three young volunteer militia men of the State of New York, did, on the 23d day of September, intercept Major John Andre, adjutant general of the British army, on his return from the American lines in the character of a spy, and, notwithstanding the large bribes offered them for his release, nobly disdaining to sacrifice their country for the sake of gold, secured and conveyed him to the commanding officer of the district, whereby the dangerous and traitorous conspiracy of Benedict Arnold was brought to light, the insidious designs of the enemy baffled, and the United States secured from impending danger.

"*Resolved*, That Congress have a high sense of the virtuous and patriotic conduct of the said John Paulding, David Williams, and Isaac Van Wart.

"In testimony whereof—

"*Ordered*, That each of them receive annually out of the public treasury two hundred dollars in specie, or an equivalent in the current money of these United States, during life. And that the Board of War procure for each of them a silver medal, on one side of which shall be a shield with the inscription, FIDELITY, and on the other the following motto: VINCIT AMOR PATRIÆ, and forward them to the commander-in-chief, who is requested to present the same with a copy of the resolution and the thanks of Congress for their fidelity and the eminent service they have rendered their country."

The only subsequent action in recognition of the services of these men will appear from the following letter :

PENSION OFFICE, *January 21, 1858.*

SIR: In answer to your letter of the 15th instant, relating to the claims of the heirs of John Paulding, David Williams, and Isaac Van Wart, I have the honor to state that the only allowance, of which we have any evidence, ever made to them by the United States was that of March 3, 1801, when Congress made the following specific appropriation, viz: "For satisfying annuities and grants to Isaac Van Wart, Jno. Paulding, David Williams, Joseph De Bealeau, Joseph Traversie, James McKensie, Joseph Brussels, Elizabeth Bergen, and the children of Major Alexander Trueman and Colonel John Harding, one thousand seven hundred and fifty-three dollars and thirty-three cents." How much of this appropriation went to Paulding, Van Wart, and Williams, I am unable to say. I do not think anything has ever been received by their widows or children, except in the case of Williams.

Nancy Williams, as the widow of David Williams aforesaid, was allowed a pension of \$200 per annum, by a special act of Congress of March 3, 1843, commencing August 2, 1831, and to continue during her life. The whole amount she has received under said act I am unable to give, for the reason that we have no evidence of her death or the date thereof.

With much respect, your obedient servant,

GEO. C. WHITING, *Commissioner.*

Hon. HENRY L. DAWES, *House of Representatives.*

It is not the intention of the committee to attempt to measure in dollars and cents the services thus rendered by these three men to their country, and to recommend a discharge of the obligation by payment. The magnitude of the service is without measure, and dollars and cents cannot repay it. Every day, however, magnifies the obligation of this free people to bear suitable testimony to the memory and services of those three humble soldiers, to whose keeping, in the providence of God, the liberties of the nation were at one time intrusted, and who proved sufficient for the hour. These men lived in poverty, leaving to their children little more than their good name. Many of those children are even in necessitous circumstances, while the country these men rescued is every day growing in prosperity, wealth, and glory. The committee take the liberty of making a part of their report a letter from Washington Irving, a resident near the scene of the events here spoken of, and which was addressed to a member of the committee in the last Congress having this matter in charge :

SUNNY SIDE, *February 20, 1857.*

SIR : An effort is making, I understand, to obtain an appropriation by Congress for the benefit of the three patriots, Paulding, Van Wart, and Williams, the captors of Andre ; and you have been pointed out as one who might be inclined to promote the measure.

Of the noble conduct of those three men, of the golden offers of ransom which they resisted, and of the important service rendered by them to their country, I need not speak. The reward decreed to them by Congress was small ; but as much, perhaps, as the impoverished circumstances of the country at that time would afford. The country is now rich, and from its overflowing treasury is disposed to testify its grateful recollection of those who aided in the glorious struggle for our independence. The names of the three men I have mentioned are among the brightest in our revolutionary history, and reflect lasting honor on our yeomanry. Some of the descendants of these men are in necessitous circumstances. I know of no case connected with the history of our revolution more worthy of a munificent testimonial by Congress of the nation's gratitude.

Asking you to excuse the liberty I have taken in thus writing to you, I remain, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

WASHINGTON IRVING.

JOHN CHAMPE.

The committee have, in connexion with the petitions of the heirs of Paulding, Williams, and Van Wart, taken into consideration the memorial of the heirs of Sergeant John Champe, of Lee's legion of cavalry in the revolutionary army. There is a propriety in considering this case in connexion with those above referred to. The treason of Arnold had been thwarted by the fidelity and incorruptibility of Paulding, Williams, and Van Wart ; but the traitor had escaped within the British lines to receive the price of his treason. It was the ardent wish of Washington to procure possession of his person and

bring him to condign punishment, and Sergeant Champe was selected by him to bring about that end by strategy. He was induced by Washington, for that purpose, to desert from the American army and join the British, in the hope, by the execution of a skilful though exceedingly hazardous plan, agreed upon beforehand, to secure the presence of the traitor. Champe accepted the task and prosecuted it well, but circumstances prevented the capture of Arnold, and he returned to the American army. General Washington rewarded his services with a captaincy, and dismissed him from the service to prevent his falling into the hands of the British, as no leniency could be expected in such a case. He also, as a further reward, and as a mark of his appreciation of his services, directed him to locate a township of land belonging to the United States government, and assured him that he would see that it was confirmed on him.

This gratuity was never bestowed upon him. The only reward which Sergeant Champe's family ever received was the pension of \$120 annually, given by Congress in 1838 to his aged widow, which she lived but a short time to enjoy. The commutation pay of an ensign was paid to his heirs in 1847, but this was no gratuity, and but the simple performance of the contract of the government. The peculiar hardships and peril of the service which Sergeant Champe took upon himself, at the risk of death upon the scaffold, always meted out to a spy, entailing ignominy upon his family to the remotest generation; the steady perseverance with which he pursued his object; the fact that he was only prevented from its accomplishment by an unexpected order, under which Arnold was placed on board the British transport on the day preceding the night agreed upon for his capture; the fact that the plan of capture was understood and approved by Washington, who was always anxious to recognize the great service and self-sacrificing patriotism of Sergeant Champe; and the fact that no substantial recognition of his services has ever been accorded him or his heirs by his country, all concur to impress upon the committee the propriety and justice of the relief proposed by them to his heirs, in connexion with similar relief to the heirs of Paulding, Williams, and Van Wart. Arnold received for his treason, at the hands of the British government, a brigadier general's commission and fifty thousand dollars in money. Shall the fidelity, incorruptibility, and self-sacrificing patriotism which baffled the traitor and saved the country, fail to be paid as well? The committee are impressed with the belief that the government has not entirely fulfilled its obligation to these parties. They do not recommend the payment of money, but the grant of a township of land to the heirs of each, from that rich domain which, through their patriotism and sacrifices, has become our inheritance, and in the hope that the names of these revolutionary worthies may be given to these townships, thus contributing to perpetuate the lessons of their lives.

In addition to this statement from Mr. Dawes' report, Mr. Cox, from the present committee, begs leave to add other facts and proofs bearing on the case of Sergeant Champe, which will be found of special interest as bearing upon this case. These facts are embodied in the

memorial of the only surviving sons of Sergeant Champe, which is hereto appended as a part of this report.

To the honorable the Congress of the United States :

The memorial of the undersigned respectfully represents: That John Champ, a native of Loudoun county, Virginia, born in the year 1756 or '57, enlisted in Lee's "Partisan Legion" of cavalry in the year 1776, and was speedily promoted for gallantry and good conduct to the rank of sergeant-major in that justly distinguished corps of the continental army.

When Washington obtained intelligence of the desertion and treason of Benedict Arnold in 1780, conferring with General (then Major) Lee, he determined, if possible, "*to seize Arnold, and, by getting him, to save Andre.*" The plan adopted by them for the arrest of Arnold involved extreme hazard to the agent who should undertake it, *either of losing his life, in attempting a feigned desertion, or afterwards in case of his capture.*

For a service so delicate, so responsible, so dangerous, John Champ, sergeant-major of Lee's "Partisan Legion" of cavalry, not yet twenty-four years of age, was chosen by Lee and Washington. After a severe struggle, for he could not bear the idea of even feigned desertion, the brave soldier, moved by affection for his great chief and true devotion to his country, consented to undertake the hazardous enterprise.

The danger with which it was attended at the very outset may be sufficiently illustrated by a brief extract from Lee's Memoirs:

* * * "and the soldiers, seeing the horse, well known to them, in our possession, made the air resound with exclamations that the scoundrel was killed.

"Major Lee, called by this heart-rending annunciation from his tent, saw the sergeant's horse led by one of Middleton's dragoons, and began to reproach himself with the blood of the high-prized, faithful, and intrepid Champ.

* * * * *

"Lee's joy was now as full as the moment before his torture had been excruciating. Never was a happier conclusion. The sergeant escaped unhurt, carrying with him to the enemy undeniable testimony of the sincerity of his desertion, cancelling every apprehension before entertained, lest the enemy might suspect him of being what he really was."

The bold and well-directed scheme for Arnold's abduction from New York was providentially frustrated, and Champ was carried with his command to the south. Champ was landed with Arnold's troops in Virginia, "nor was he able to escape from the British army until after the junction of Lord Cornwallis at Petersburg, when he deserted." Joining the American army soon after it had passed the Congaree river, in pursuit of Lord Rawdon, Champ was introduced to General Greene, who, "having provided the sergeant with a good horse and money for his journey, sent him to General Washington, who munificently anticipated every desire of the sergeant, and presented him with his discharge from the service, lest he might, in the vicissi-

tudes of war, fall into the enemy's hands, when, if recognized, he was sure to die on the gibbet."

Your memorialists have indulged in liberal quotations from "Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States, by Henry Lee, lieutenant colonel commandant of the partisan legion during the American War," *volume 2, chapter 30*, only for the purpose of illustrating the service rendered by Sergeant-major Champ, in the war of the revolution. In a note appended to the same chapter, General Lee states that "when General Washington was called by President Adams to the command of the army, prepared to defend the country from French hostility, he sent to Lieutenant Colonel Lee to inquire for Champ; being determined to bring him into the field at the head of a company of infantry. Lee sent to Loudoun county, where Champ settled after his discharge from the army, when he learned that the gallant soldier had removed to Kentucky, where he had soon after died." But this statement is incorrect. After Champ's discharge, he returned to Loudoun county, and married Phœbe Barnard. He resided there some time, when he removed to the Alleghany mountains, in Hardy county, Virginia. He entered two small tracts of commonwealth's land there, in the year 178—. The only extraordinary compensation he ever received for his military service, was a bounty land warrant of inconsiderable value. Having a large family and being very poor, he went to Kentucky for the purpose of securing a home there, (leaving his family behind, in Hampshire county, Virginia,) and there he sickened and died in the year 1807.

He left a widow and large family who afterwards made their way to Ohio. Of his children and grandchildren, there are now living two sons, both of whom were soldiers in the war of 1812, and twenty-six grandchildren. His two surviving sons subscribe this memorial.

In consideration of the eminent service for which their ancestor was chosen by the Father of his country; that he received little or no compensation from his country during his life, nor did his widow after him, who died at an advanced age, in the year 1841, (May 12th;) these memorialists pray the honorable Congress of the United States for themselves, and others, the heirs and lineal descendants of John Champ, sergeant-major of Lee's "Partisan Legion" of cavalry, in the continental service, for a grant of any township of land in either State or Territory which the government may own and select, or for other compensation, and a *memorial* such as the services rendered may seem to demand, in token of honorable and appropriate recognition of the patriot's worth by his grateful country.

And your memorialists will ever pray, &c., &c.

NATHANIEL CHAMP,

Of Onondaga, Ingham county, Michigan.

WILLIAM CHAMP,

Of Peoria county, Illinois.

The committee, therefore, in accordance with this memorial, report the accompanying bill.

